

Speech by Christopher Booker

Bruges Group International Conference 2013

The great "non-debate", the one thing Cameron and his supporters say they want from Britain's membership of the EU in participation in the Single Market. Yet, in parallel, they are fearful of allowing any mention of the remarkable number of countries who are just as free as we are to trade with the Single Market without having either to belong to the European Union or to accept all its ever-increasing mountain of political baggage.

These countries include the two most prosperous countries in Europe, Norway and Switzerland, who are entirely free to trade in the Single Market, because they belong to the European Economic Area or also, like Norway, to the European Free Trade Area, which Britain itself led the way in setting up back in 1959.

The reason why the host of "Cameronites" never ever want to see honestly discussed is because that makes a complete nonsense of their pretence that you can only belong to the Single Market by remaining inside the EU.

The second point in this "non-debate" is that we cannot have any illusions that for Britain to extricate itself from the EU would be an incredibly complicated business. We are now entangled with it by such an astonishing web of laws and treaties that picking our way out of them would take years of dedicated work by a whole army of officials and lawyers.

There simply is no magic wand here. It could only be done through patient negotiation, directed by a British government which had the will and determination to make it work.

In fact, there is only one way in which we could legally compel our EU colleagues to agree with us that such a process of negotiation must take place and that is by invoking Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty.

This, of course, is another of those things which makes nonsense of the position adopted by the Cameronites. Because leaving the EU is the one thing they insist they could never contemplate because, they say, it would mean that we are shut out of the Single Market.

Yet we can see from the examples of countries like Norway that one can have all the advantages of trading with the Single Market without having to sign up to all the rest of what it means to be part of the EU. These people are so used to not thinking straight, so lost in their confused little bubble that simply cannot get the point.

So points one and two are that we should aim to emulate the shining example of Norway by joining them in EFTA, and we can only do that by first invoking Article 50 and leaving the EU, with all the rest of its dreary and suffocating political paraphernalia.

But the third point is that we somehow have to get this plain and simple alternative injected into the centre of our national debate. For far too long our case for getting out of this disaster called Europe has been utterly sterile because it is so endlessly

and repetitively negative. We all know the EU is an unmitigated disaster. We all know that for us ever to have got drawn into it in the first place was, in the immortal words of Margaret Thatcher, "a political error of the first magnitude".

What the British people need is to have their eyes lifted out of this sterile little *cul de sac*, to be given a positive alternative, a positive vision of what this country could be once again if we were again free to decide our own independent future, to decide our own laws, to chart our own destiny in the world. "Where there is no vision, the people perish".

For too long we have had no vision and bit by bit we have perished. Do you know what is the worst consequence of all of the fact that for 40 years we have been subjected to this prison of the mind that is "littte Europe"? As a people we have lost the ability even to think straight about our politics. We have been infantilised. It is time we learned again as a sovereign nation what it is to be grown up.